

ARTS & BOOKS

Gloomy superheroes on screen

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In 2007 dark and gloomy will be the dominant hues in both sequels and new adaptations of comic books for screen. From *Ghost Rider* to *Iron Man*, heroes are changing faces and sport a sombre mask.

The mood and style of the heroes created by Marvel and DC Comics publishing companies have often been read as a faithful reflection of the American psyche.

For instance, during the Depression and the war years, Marvel created patriotically themed superheroes, such as *Captain America* (1941), as well as *übermensch* archetypes which were extremely popular. They went out of fashion in the post-war years, as they were overtaken by DC Comics' *Batman*, *Superman* and *Wonder Woman*. Readers in the late 1950s and early 1960s found it easier to sympathise and identify with these superheroes in the « real world » whose problems and life-styles seemed more human. Marvel adapted to this new competition by creating the *Fantastic Four* (1961), a whole family of superheroes with more mundane preoccupations.

In the 1980s, strong, handsome, and fearless heroes like the *X-men* (originally created in 1963), *Daredevil* (originally created in 1964) and *Ghost Rider* (originally created in 1973), became hugely popular. A decade later, the pendulum swung again and the wish for more well-rounded and complex characters appeared. *Superman* and *Batman* came back in force.

A number of Marvel comic book characters were turned into highly successful film series, like the *X-Men*, starting in 2000, and *Spider-Man*, beginning in 2002.

However, 2007 will be a turning point : gloomy and angst-filled superheroes are now all the rage.

The adaptation of *Ghost Rider*, directed by Mark Steven Johnson is to be released worldwide this February. The filmmaker repeatedly said he wanted to picture a super dark hero. The main character, Johnny Blaze, sells his soul to the devil in order to save his father. At night, he becomes a ghost and must fight against evil. He has no choice but face his destiny. Peter Parker, aka Spiderman, is also tortured by questions about his own power. *Spiderman III*, directed by Sam Raimi, will be released in May. In this third sequel, Parker's famous red and blue suit symbolically turns black, the hero loses his self-control and becomes overconfident and vengeful.

Fantastic Four: Rise of The Silver Surfer directed by Kevin Smith will be released in August. The four heroes encounter the intergalactic herald Silver Surfer, who comes to Earth to prepare it for destruction and wreaks havoc all around the globe.

2008 should not be more gleeful for Marvel characters. *Iron man*, directed by Jon Favreau, will also focus on the dark side of the famous hero.

Sources:

www.sonypictures.com/movies/
www.marvel.com/